



CCM 2013 Testimony

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PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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CCM is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government -- your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members represent over 92% of Connecticut's population. We appreciate this opportunity to testify before this joint committee on the issue of mandates reform, a top priority of CCM's.

SB 1113, "An Act Eliminating Certain Municipal Mandates"

CCM supports this attempt to reduce unfunded state mandates. However, with towns and cities facing the prospect of losing over \$700 million in state aid, we urge the Committee to go further to provide much greater relief from costly mandates.

There are over 1,200 state mandates imposed on Hometown Connecticut and their residential and business property taxpayers. Relief from some of these mandates is important to the recovery of municipalities during the biggest fiscal crisis in recent memory.

Connecticut towns and cities empathize with the State's fiscal problems. Municipalities across our state have enacted painful budget cuts and are making preparations for additional cuts. Deep cuts in services and massive layoffs have occurred in Connecticut's central cities -- with the prospect of additional cuts and layoffs on the horizon. Municipalities must still provide the services residents depend on such as education, public safety and infrastructure maintenance, regardless of the economy.

At a time when towns and cities are struggling mightily to continue to provide needed services to residents and businesses, meaningful mandates relief is needed this year -- relief well beyond that contained in SB 1113.

Support Additional Mandates Relief THIS YEAR

To provide meaningful mandates reform during the most challenging fiscal crisis since the Great Depression, CCM urges the Committee to be bold and support the following reforms:

- **Amend the State's prevailing wage rate mandate [CGS 31-53(g)]:** (a) adjust the thresholds for renovation construction projects, from \$100,000 to \$400,000; (b) adjust the thresholds for new construction projects, from \$400,000 to \$1 million. The current thresholds have not been raised since 1991.

- **Modestly modify state-mandated compulsory binding arbitration laws** under the Municipal Employee Relations Act (MERA) and the Teacher Negotiation Act (TNA) by (a) requiring that all neutral municipal arbitrators be members of the American Arbitration Association, and (b) preventing an arbitration panel from considering a municipal reserve fund balance when determining municipalities' financial capability.
- **Eliminate the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR)** that prevents municipalities from finding savings and efficiencies in board of education budgets. At the very least, the **MBR should be eliminated** for FYs 14-15 to allow municipalities to find reasonable savings for their property taxpayers, **or at the very least provide for reductions if certain cost savings or efficiencies can be achieved.** CCM supports ensuring that state education aid is spent on education - *every community in Connecticut already spends more on K-12 public education than they receive from the State.*
- **Allow towns and cities to post legal and other notices on their websites, rather than in newspapers.** This is a costly – and unnecessary – unfunded state mandate.
CCM discusses this proposal further in separate testimony submitted to the Committee.
- **Allow municipalities that are scheduled to conduct a property revaluation – particularly physical - in 2013 and 2014, the option to delay that revaluation for at least one year,** as a reasonable response to the uncertainties of the current market.
- Clarify the **statutory definition of "department head"** for purposes of excluding such personnel from collective bargaining.
- **Repeal the statute that requires one union for the uniformed employees of municipal police departments and municipal fire departments.** Present law requires rank and file employees and supervisors to be in the same union – which has a chilling effect on management authority.

Municipalities recognize that it is neither practical nor desirable to eliminate all unfunded or inadequately funded state mandates, but serious relief is long overdue. Reform to state mandates is a logical approach to offset depleting state revenues and a growing state deficit.

CCM urges the Committee to go beyond the limited reforms proposed in SB 1113, to provide meaningful mandates relief, relief that would save struggling towns and cities substantial money.

Please remember: Serious mandates reform = serious relief to Connecticut's hard-pressed property taxpayers.

Thank you.

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If you have any questions, please contact Ron Thomas (rthomas@ccm-ct.org) or Jim Finley (jfinley@ccm-ct.org) at (203) 498-3000.